

## SPRING EPHEMERALS

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out at us from beneath the protective flap. The three large leaflets that make up this flower's leaves also draw our attention to this springtime sermon.



**Squirrel corn** (*Dicentra canadensis*) looks like neither squirrel nor corn. Below the surface are small tubers that are described as looking like kernels of corn, or small yellow peas. These tubers are also called "corms", so the name could refer to their appearance or a variation on corm. And where do the squirrels come in? They are said to eat the tasty tubers, although they may also be digging about the forest floor in early spring in search of nuts. Gardeners may recognize this plant as belonging to the same family as bleeding hearts with dangling white flowers and feathery leaves.

These and so many other magical sights await the intrepid seeker who sets out in the changeable days of early spring. That these remarkable plants will not wait indefinitely to charm you; instead a bit of effort, or at least desire, is required. If you have a field guide, be sure to take it along to help with introductions to our woodland beauties. But simply spending time in our awakening landscape is a worthwhile experience.



852 Avery Road  
Rockville, MD 20851  
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[www.rockvillemd.gov/croydoncreek](http://www.rockvillemd.gov/croydoncreek)

## Spring Festival

**April 25 • 1-4 p.m.**

Bring the entire family to enjoy the wonders of nature in an urban setting.

**This event is free and no registration is required.**

- Woodland Hikes • Spring Plant Sale • Nature Games and Crafts
- Exhibits and Activities that celebrate Earth Day.



# The Croydon Chronicle

NEWSLETTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2009



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City of Rockville  
Department of Recreation & Parks



## LETTER FROM THE SUPERVISOR

**Change...** It all started when a tiger swallowtail appeared in the Nature Center in February. One of our junior naturalists had found a chrysalis during the winter and brought it inside thinking it wasn't alive. It was.

Turns out that even the chrysalis had cabin fever! The butterfly was an early and unseasonal reminder that change was coming. Spring and summer seem to bring about rapid changes in nature. Spring ephemerals bloom and lead to summer wildflowers, bluebirds stake out their summer homes and the stark winter tree canopy turns greener each day. It's an exhilarating time of year.

Some exciting changes are coming to the Croydon Creek Nature Center, too. In keeping with the Mayor and Council's vision for a Sustainable Rockville, the Nature Center is working with an area exhibit design company to develop an interactive exhibit focused on watershed sustainability. The exhibit will educate visitors about the importance of watersheds, as well as show visitors what they can do to make a positive impact on the watershed in which they live. This exhibit should be completed by the end of August.

If you cannot wait until August, come to the Nature Center and take part in our Go Green lecture series. You will learn how to take advantage of storm-water runoff by creating a rain garden or collecting it in rain barrels, as well as how to use native plants to attract wildlife to your backyard.

You can purchase a selection of native plants at our annual Spring Festival and Native Plant Sale on April 25 from 1-4 p.m. We will have a horticulturist and master gardener on hand to answer gardening questions. Pre-order plants or plan to arrive early as the plants tend to sell out in the first hour.

Our summer programs have undergone some improvements. The Nature Center continues to host a variety of summer camps including the popular NCTV camp, Nature Explorations camps and Guppy camps.

New this year is our Native Naturalist camp, which combines the concepts of environmental sustainability with Native American traditions. Eco-Explorers is another new program that consists of three one-day camps designed to bridge the gap between the end of school and the beginning of summer camp season. Based on visitor feedback the Nature Center is discontinuing our camps for 3- to 5-year-olds. Instead of week long Polliwog Camps, we invite 3- to 5-year-olds to join us for weekly Polliwog Adventures. Sign up for one or all nine, and bring an adult to join in the fun.

We hope to see you soon at Croydon Creek Nature Center.

Cheers,

Elissa Totin,

Nature Center Supervisor

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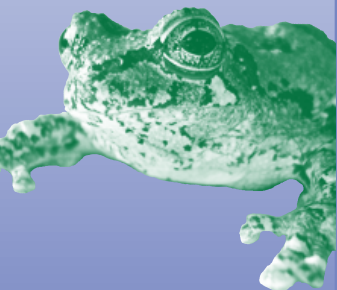


MEET THE CROYDON CRITTERS

Kringle, a gray tree frog, has been living at the Nature Center since January 2006. He came to be in our care after one of our patrons was disassembling their Christmas tree and found him hiding in the branches. We gladly took him in and he has been happily living here ever since.

Gray tree frogs (*Hyla versicolor*) are relatively small frogs (just 1.5 – 2-inches long) that are common in Maryland. They live high in the trees, eating mosquitoes, flies and moths. Tiny suction cups on the bottom of their toes help them keep hold of the trees. Gray tree frogs are camouflage experts, as they are able to change their color from gray to green to brown.

Spring and summer are good times of year to hear tree frogs calling at night. Listen carefully when you are outside for a call that sounds like children laughing. The next time you are in the Nature Center, you can find Kringle in his enclosure. Try to spot his suction cup toes.



KIDS ACTIVITIES

Make a Nature Journal

A nature journal is a great way to keep track of the things you see outdoors. You can use it for keeping notes about the species you see and making drawings to remind you of what it looks like later. You can even cut up small pieces of contact paper to use for taping things you find into your nature journal.

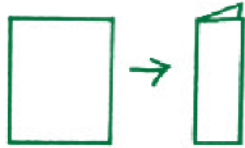
Follow these simple instructions to make a journal to keep track of wildlife you see this spring and summer.

Supplies:

- Several sheets of paper
- 1 elastic band
- 1 stick about the height of the folded paper after step 1
- Hole punch

Making the Book:

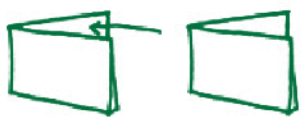
1. Fold each paper in half the long way so it is long and skinny like a hot dog. If it has writing on it, the writing should be on the inside.



2. Fold each paper in half the other way.



3. Tuck one folded piece inside the other.



4. Punch two holes through all the layers about ¼-inch in from the folded edge of the papers.



5. Wrap the elastic around the top of the stick and put the end into and through the top hole.



6. Turn the book over. At the back of the book, pull the end of the elastic down and put it through the bottom hole. Insert the other end of the stick into the loop.



Source: [www.makingbooks.com](http://www.makingbooks.com)

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

If you visit the Nature Center on Wednesday mornings, you probably recognize Joe Andrews. Each week he arrives at the Nature Center with a smile, ready to complete the tasks at hand. You may have seen him filling, cleaning or repairing one of our bird-feeders or cleaning the tank that our Dace call home.



Along with his weekly volunteer work, Joe helps with our large family events, such as Croydon Creep and the Spring Festival. For the past five years he has been an invaluable member of the volunteer team at Croydon Creek.

Before his tenure began at the Nature Center, Joe taught fourth- and sixth-graders. He was active in teaching environmental education and was named Montgomery County’s Outdoor Educator of the Year. He was also was honored by *Time Magazine for Kids* for his work in bringing environmental education to the classroom.

Croydon Creek Nature Center isn’t Joe’s only volunteer work. He also spends time as a volunteer docent at the National Zoo and at the Audubon Naturalist Society. His love of the outdoors and working with people is reflected in his endeavors.

The Croydon Creek staff feels lucky to have Joe as part of our team. His love of nature shows in his dedication to the center. We appreciate the contributions that he makes to our work at the Nature Center.



SPRING EPHEMERALS

By Carol Hayes, Naturalist

What better way to shake off the monochromatic, predictable cloak of winter, than to open our eyes to the charm of spring ephemerals? These woodland denizens of the changing season offer an array of sights that should lure us out of hibernation and on to the paths and trails of parks and preserves. In addition to their delightful appearance, the common names of many of these flowers add another layer of interest and enjoyment.

True to their name, these wildflowers last for only a brief time – in some cases, only a day or two. By the time warm weather arrives the ephemerals’ day has set. This is because their life span is directly related to the trees under whose shadow they bloom.

Their window is limited to the time during which the sun is strong enough to warm the soil, but before trees have sprouted their leaves, allowing them their brief stint in the sun. Spring also brings wet weather, providing the moisture needed, as well as a good supply of nutrients, garnered from a winter’s worth of decomposition.

All flora are officially identified by their Latin names, which even amateurs may find helpful, as many plants have more than one common name. Some even share the same or similar names. But it is fun to wonder how flowers received the common names that have been passed down from earlier times. One striking element is the thorough knowledge our forbearers had of plants, with names often being attached to their uses instead of their appearance and color.

What is usually considered the first flower of spring actually greets us when winter is only half over. **Skunk cabbage** (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) was poking through a crust of ice on Jan. 31 at Great Falls, not heralding spring so much as serving as a promise of things to come. True to its name, skunk cabbage boasts a pungent smell that attracts bees and flies. These insects seem happy to be led to the tiny flowers nestled in the protective purple-green hood-like spathe – a cozy respite from the elements. Moving on from the skunk to the cabbage, the wide green leaves begin to grow cabbage-like as the spathe breaks down. Ultimately they may grow two feet or more and are a notable sight in wetlands.



Our next flower does not possess a name tied to its appearance or scent: **Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) is a beautiful bright white flower with one leaf that clasps the stem protectively until the single flower blooms. It is a welcome contrast with the brown leaves from which it arises. Looking beneath the leaf litter, one would unearth the origin of bloodroot’s name: its root produces a red substance that was once used by Native Americans for dyes and medicine. Today, of course, we would not want to destroy this or any other delicate woodland flower to observe or use its root.

A celebration of spring by its very name, **spring beauty** (*Claytonia virginica*), is another early flower with a useful root. In fact, one other common name for this small white or pink flower is fairy spuds, so named because the small roundish tubers are reported to taste like potatoes. But far more important, these early flowers have delicate pink lines running from the tip of the petal to its center and have been likened to a landing strip – for nectar-seeking insects. With slender stems and leaves, the dainty appearance of these flowers belie their importance to hungry insects beginning their quest for nectar, and who are drawn to the spreading carpets of these bright flowers.

A showy wildflower of spring is the **trout lily** (*Erythronium rostratum*), a small yellow bloom with two mottled leaves. It is these markings that give the trout lily its name. The spots are reminiscent of a trout’s markings and the flower is also more common near forested waterways. Another name for this flower that is inspired by the spotted leaves is fawn lily. The yellow petals of the flower sweep back and long pollen-bearing stamens protrude in a dramatic fashion, illustrating another common name, adder’s tongue.



One of the more whimsically named and uniquely structured flowers is **jack-in-the-pulpit** (*Arisaema triphyllum*). Like skunk cabbage, which belongs to the same family, it is brought to our attention by the green and purple-brown spathe that surrounds, then with a pointed hood, arches over the club-shaped spadix, or “jack” that peers

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About eight years ago when Pumpkin, a common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), came to live at the Nature Center, she was just a hatchling that weighed about 5 ounces. She now weighs about 12 pounds and is still growing. It is not uncommon for snapping turtles to weigh up to 35 pounds and grow to about 20 inches in diameter.

Snapping turtles get their name from their aggressive behavior. They use their strong jaws and long neck to protect themselves from predators and to find their food. Their favorite foods include fish, worms, plants and sometimes even birds. In the wild you can find them in shallow ponds and swamps. They spend most of their time underwater, but in the spring when they are looking for nesting sites you can see them out and about.

If you encounter one outside, do not try to pick it up. Remember how they got their name. If you don’t have any luck seeing one outside, stop by the Nature Center and say, “Hello,” to Pumpkin.

